

VZCZCXR06712

OO RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR

DE RUEHPG #0102/01 0331549

ZNY CCCCC ZZH

O 021549Z FEB 07

FM AMEMBASSY PRAGUE

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8525

INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 1814

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PRAGUE 000102

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

EUR/NCE FOR GARBER AND FICHTE, EUR/PRA FOR FRIEDT AND
AZEVEDO, NSC FOR HAYWARD AND STERLING, OSD FOR IARROBINO
AND SADOWSKA, USNATO FOR SHEEHAN AND MALONEY

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/25/2016

TAGS: PREL PGOV MASS MARR EZ

SUBJECT: MISSILE DEFENSE: CZECH GOVERNMENT STRATEGY - MEET
FIRE WITH WATER

REF: A. PRAGUE 52

1B. PRAGUE 66

1C. PRAGUE 62

Classified By: Political Counselor Michael Dodman for reasons 1.4 (b) a
nd (d)

11. (C) The Czech Government has adopted a strategy of maximum openness with the public in an effort to ensure the success of its plans to host a U.S. missile defense (MD) radar. Czech opponents of missile defense have tried to draw analogies with Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia; opponents also cite as concern the increasingly strident comments from Moscow and the lack of a clear link between the U.S. system and NATO. In the tense domestic political environment, the opposition Social Democrats (CSSD) are moving towards a position of formal opposition to the U.S. offer. After a weak start, the "No to Bases" NGO campaign has gained some strength, conducting a sophisticated and suspiciously well-financed public outreach program. The governors of the two administrative areas surrounding the proposed site are actively trying to build support in the local communities. Government efforts will be focused on convincing the small but critical Green party of the benefit of the U.S. system. The GOCR intends to reply to the U.S. Note by the end of February; Deputy FM Pojar will no doubt discuss the Note and related issues during his Feb 6-9 visit to Washington. Also on the horizon are visits to Washington by senior Green party and CSSD officials. Visits to Prague by senior MDA and other officials will help solidify public and parliamentary support. End summary.

CZECH GOVERNMENT: YOU CAN SEE THERE IS NOTHING TO
FEAR BECAUSE WE HAVE NOTHING TO HIDE

12. (C) Czech Prime Minister Mirek Topolanek and his cabinet fully support the U.S. offer to begin negotiations on a missile defense base. After Topolanek's initial press conference with senior national security leaders within hours of winning his vote of confidence (Ref A), and a Czech National Security Council decision to open MD talks with the United States (Ref B), government officials continue to engage in events designed to assuage public fears about a foreign military presence by sharing the facts about the possible MD facility. The effort is a conscious decision by Topolanek to seize the initiative on MD and to confront critics and skeptics with maximum transparency. So far Topolanek's strategy of meeting fire with water has been

relatively successful. The debate among many serious politicians is becoming one of principled disagreement between fans of multilateralism and those who prefer to embrace transatlantic security with bilateral as well as multilateral links. However, the public stand of many of these same politicians is pitched in terms that are designed to provoke a heartfelt opposition to foreign troops on domestic soil. Overall the public seem interested, somewhat skeptical, but not deeply worried, and the press has not been hesitant to remove the missile defense issue from the front pages when more compelling stories arise.

CSSD: MOVING TOWARDS OUTRIGHT OPPOSITION

¶3. (C) After eight years in government, the opposition Social Democrats (CSSD) are having no trouble adapting to the psychology of an opposition role. Many in the party are genuinely opposed to the U.S. MD system for various reasons: preference for multilateral mechanisms, concern about Russian reaction, skepticism about the nature of the threat, and no doubt some outright fear that foreign troops should not be stationed on Czech territory. Despite vocal opposition from many leading CSSD officials, party chairman (and former Prime Minister) Jiri Paroubek had until recently kept open the option for CSSD support for MD, specifically by stating that a referendum for a radar station would not be necessary. However, CSSD's position has recently begun to harden. The party's top leaders met Feb 2 and issued a statement clearly calling for a referendum. The party's main decision-making organ, the Central Executive Committee, will meet on Feb 10. CSSD Vice Chairman Bohuslav Sobotka told Ambassador on Feb 2 that he expected the Committee would adopt a firm position

PRAGUE 00000102 002 OF 003

that called for a referendum and placed the party formally against the U.S. proposal. Asked why the party was shifting from its previous constructive approach, Sobotka said it was the result of the party being in opposition and "the way the government was formed" (i.e., that the fact that two CSSD rebels enabled the vote of confidence). Paroubek is also no doubt looking ahead to a March CSSD Party Congress, at which he is up for re-election. Ambassador will see Paroubek on Feb 5 to urge him to make sure that the resolution adopted at the Feb 10 meeting does not fully close the door to possible CSSD support for a bill that is many months away (and which will be based on an agreement yet to be negotiated).

"NO TO BASES" CAMPAIGN GAINS A LITTLE TRACTION

¶4. (C) "No to Bases," after a slow start, has begun to emerge in the public consciousness as a rallying point for those who oppose U.S. foreign policy. The organizers of a January 29 demonstration in Prague of 500 people against the planned radar claimed to have called out members of 40 different organizations. Police sources confirmed the appearance of both anarchists and neo Nazis at the rally, but there was no violence. The common factor in this big-tent dynamic is opposition to U.S. foreign policy writ large. The leadership of the organization is young, motivated, intelligent, and suspiciously well financed. The group's website (nezakladnam.cz) is a professional quality site that is constantly updated, and even features a 13 minute high quality movie tying the group the peace movements over the last 40 years (note: The writing on the website features several inaccurate and misleading claims designed to motivate opposition to the base. End note). The group also seems to have no shortage of professionally printed promotional material.

GOVERNORS GO TO BAT FOR THE U.S. BECAUSE THE
MAYORS NEED CONVINCING

15. (SBU) Support for the U.S. offer is coming not only from the national government. Governors Petr Bendl (of the Central Bohemia region, in which the Brdy Military Training Area is located) and Petr Zimmerman (of the Western Bohemia region, which borders the Training Area) held a January 26 open meeting with the mayors of the towns surrounding the Training Area. Attendees included Deputy PM Sasa Vondra, Deputy FM Thomas Pojar, Deputy DefMin Martin Bartak, and Brigadier General Ivo Zboril, Director MOD Force Development Division, along with Ambassador Graber. The meeting was well attended and fully open to the press. Government officials answered questions regarding the U.S. proposal (size of facility, number of employees, possible radiation emissions from the radar, etc); the Ambassador offered assurances that U.S. personnel in the country will be subject to Czech law, as determined in eventual SOFA negotiations. The most common questions dealt with possible environmental impact of the facility; Czech officials assured the local leaders that this had been a prominent part of discussions to date, and would be a priority during negotiations. Ambassador promised to visit the region to meet with local officials, and also to consider opportunities to take local leaders to see U.S. bases in Germany. The regional officials announced plans to open a hotline for residents, and promised to coordinate closely with MFA, MOD, and the embassy.

NATO LINK A TOP PRIORITY

16. (C) The Topolanek government continues to portray the MD initiative as a contribution to the security of Europe and the United States. Acutely aware that multilateral organizations have massive public support (a recent poll showed the UN to be twice as popular as the government), Topolanek's MD advisors have sought to highlight possible future cooperation with NATO as a reason the public should support the initiative. However, CSSD and Green Party pressure is showing. In a January 30 briefing on MD for the diplomatic corps (designed to encourage positive statements in Prague from more than just Americans and Czechs) Political Director Martin Povejsil said that the Czech Republic would

PRAGUE 00000102 003 OF 003

insist that a radar facility become part of any future NATO-wide system. This is the furthest we have heard any Czech Government official lean on this, and may reflect an issue that will appear in negotiations. At the least, we know that the GOCR will be looking for every opportunity to convince the public and lawmakers that the U.S. system could be compatible with a future NATO national MD system.

COMMENT

17. (C) The domestic political situation continues to cloud the road ahead. We expect CSSD will soon join the Communists in outright opposition to the U.S. offer. Topolanek's ODS and the Christian Democrats are firmly in support. That leaves the untested Greens, the third party in the coalition, as the leading unknown. The Greens are genuinely divided on the issue, with their focus squarely on the link to NATO. The leading Green skeptic, Ondrej Liska, the Chairman of parliament's EU Affairs Committee, has told post he will visit Washington later this month to attempt to gather information for himself and for use within the party (another visitor later this month, participating in a long-planned International Visitor Program, will be CSSD Deputy Jan Hamacek, an opponent of MD who heads the Foreign Affairs Committee). Our focus in the weeks ahead, in addition to providing national and local officials with the information they need to shape the debate, will remain on CSSD and the Greens. Important in this effort will be a visit to Prague

from a senior USG official on MD, ideally General Obering, to meet with government and parliament and directly answer questions and concerns.

18. (C) The GOCR remains confident that they will have the votes necessary to pass an eventual US-Czech agreement through the parliament -- although they readily admit that the political landscape could change during the course of the year. This view is shared even by skeptics, like Liska, who told the embassy recently that he expected the government would win even if the Green MPs were not united in support. Even supporters of a referendum admit that this will not come to pass, since ODS has the votes to block a referendum bill in Parliament. However, we expect continued vocal discussion of a referendum, and perhaps even support for this from the Greens, as a way to win points among party faithful.

19. (C) While there are many supporters of MD in the current government, the official who has been leading the MD effort is Deputy Foreign Minister Tomas Pojar. He will be in Washington for consultations Feb 6-9. Pojar told ADCM this week that he expects the Czech reply to the U.S. diplomatic note will be delivered towards the end of February, and that he would be discussing the Czech reply during his visit. Pojar will be the point person on the negotiations as well as the political effort to win an eventual vote in parliament. He is a firm believer in the importance of MD as a source of increased security in Europe, and as a way to bolster the Czech-U.S. relationship.

GRABER